

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A club manager for managing a club in an electronic commerce system having a user and at least one affiliate comprising:
 - a registration function to register the user as a club member; and
 - a credential creation function to create a value token associating the club member with a benefit provided by the at least one affiliate of the club manager, to cryptographically sign the value token to create a credential, and to communicate the credential to the at least one affiliate for fulfillment of the benefit.
2. The club manager of claim 1, further comprising:
 - a credential storage function to store information associating the club member with the value token and the benefit.
3. The club manager of claim 1, wherein the value token comprises at least one of a membership number, a random number, a billing number, personal information about the user, a user-selected password, and time-stamp information.
4. The club manager of claim 1, wherein the benefit comprises provision to the club member of at least one of a prize, a product discount, a service discount, free goods, free services, and access to content, goods, and services not available to the general public.
5. The club manager of claim 1, wherein the club manager comprises a web site.

SUB A2
 1 6. An affiliate in an electronic commerce system for providing benefits to
 2 users that are members of a club controlled by a club manager comprising:
 3 a credential verification function to receive a credential including a value
 4 token from the club manager, the value token associating a user with
 5 entitlement to a benefit as a club member, and to verify the authenticity of the
 6 credential; and
 7 a benefit provision function to provide the benefit to the club member if the
 8 value token is valid.

1 7. The affiliate of claim 6, further comprising a credential database to
 2 store credentials for completed transactions of provision of the benefits.

1 8. The affiliate of claim 6, wherein the benefit comprises provision to the
 2 club member of at least one of a prize, a product discount, a service discount,
 3 free goods, free services, and access to content, goods, and services not
 4 available to the general public.

1 ~~9. The affiliate of claim 6, wherein the affiliate comprises a web site.~~

SUB K3
 1 10. An electronic commerce system comprising:
 2 a club manager to register a user as a club member, to create a value
 3 token associating the club member with entitlement to a benefit, and to
 4 cryptographically sign the value token to create a credential; and
 5 at least one affiliate to receive the credential from the club manager, to
 6 verify the authenticity of the value token of the credential, and to provide the
 7 benefit to the club member if the value token is valid.

1 11. The electronic commerce system of claim 10, wherein the club
 2 manager and the at least one affiliate are web sites, the system further
 3 comprising at least one server and a network for coupling the club manager to
 4 the at least one affiliate.

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12. In an electronic commerce system, a method of allowing a user to obtain a benefit from at least one affiliate because the user is a member of a club, comprising:

- registering the user as a member of the club;
- creating a value token associating the club member with entitlement to the benefit;
- cryptographically signing the value token to create a credential; and
- communicating the credential to the at least one affiliate.

13. The method of claim 12, further comprising using the value token previously created for this club member and benefit when the benefit has been obtained by the club member.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein the value token comprises at least one of a membership number, a random number, a billing number, personal information about the user, a user-selected password, and time-stamp information.

15. The method of claim 12, wherein the benefit comprises provision to the club member of at least one of a prize, a product discount, a service discount, free goods, free services, and access to content, goods, and services not available to the general public.

16. The method of claim 12, wherein communicating the credential comprises sending the credential to at least one affiliate as a link implemented in dynamic hyper-text markup language.

17. In an electronic commerce system, a method of providing a benefit to a member of a club controlled by a club manager comprising:

3 receiving a credential signed by the club manager, the credential including
 4 a value token associating a club member with entitlement to a benefit;
 5 verifying authenticity of the value token; and
 6 obtaining information from the club member to complete a benefit
 7 transaction and providing the benefit to the club member when the value token is
 8 verified.

1 18. The method of claim 17, further comprising registering the value
 2 token as used after the benefit transaction is completed.

1 19. The method of claim 17, further comprising billing the club manager
 2 for the benefit provided to the club member.

1 20. The method of claim 17, wherein the value token comprises at least
 2 one of a membership number, a random number, a billing number, personal
 3 information about the user, a user-selected password, and time-stamp
 4 information.

1 21. The method of claim 17, wherein verifying the authenticity further
 2 comprises determining that the value token has not been previously used.

1 22. In an electronic commerce system, a method of obtaining a benefit
 2 from an affiliate of a club controlled by a club manager, comprising:

3 registering as a member of the club;

4 indicating to the club manager a desire to receive a benefit from an
 5 affiliate; and

6 in response to a request from the affiliate, communicating information to
 7 the affiliate to enable the affiliate to deliver the benefit.

1 23. The method of claim 22, wherein the club manager and affiliate
 2 comprise web sites and the benefit comprises provision to the club member of at

3 least one of a prize, a product discount, a service discount, free goods, free
 4 services, and access to content, goods, and services not available to the general
 5 public.

6 *Sub A*
 1 24. An article comprising: a machine readable medium having a plurality
 2 of machine readable instructions, wherein when the instructions are executed by
 3 a processor, the instructions allow a user to obtain a benefit from at least one
 4 affiliate because the user is a member of a club in an electronic commerce
 5 system, by

6 registering the user as a member of the club;
 7 creating a value token associating the club member with entitlement to the
 8 benefit;
 9 cryptographically signing the value token to create a credential; and
 10 communicating the credential to the at least one affiliate.

1 25. An article comprising: a machine readable medium having a plurality
 2 of machine readable instructions, wherein when the instructions are executed by
 3 a processor, the instructions coordinate provision of a benefit by an affiliate to a
 4 member of a club controlled by a club manager in an electronic commerce
 5 system by:

6 receiving a credential signed by the club manager, the credential including
 7 a value token associating a club member with entitlement to a benefit;
 8 verifying authenticity of the value token; and
 9 obtaining information from the club member to complete a benefit
 10 transaction and providing the benefit to the club member when the value token is
 11 verified.

1 26. An article comprising: a machine readable medium having a plurality
 2 of machine readable instructions, wherein when the instructions are executed by
 3 a processor, the instructions provide for obtaining a benefit from an affiliate of a
 4 club controlled by a club manager in an electronic commerce system by

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